

A Program Evaluation of Intersession Tutoring

Nandang Kosasih Ananda

Abstract: This study examined one program which was in place in a multi-track year-round elementary school, a tutoring program delivered during the students' intersession. Through interviews, surveys, and analysis of grades recorded on report cards, the program was evaluated to determine whether goals for the program were met. Survey data revealed that students, parents, and teachers all felt overwhelmingly that the program was effective at meeting stated program goals. Report card data did not show a statistically significant increase in grades after students attended the program, but many intervening variables were not controlled for. Additional convenience factors, such as transportation, cost, and timing contributed to the program benefits.

Keywords: program evaluation, intersession tutoring.

There is a growing body of literature on the topic of year-round education. Most studies reported either positive academic gains or no negative impact performance when a year-round calendar is adopted (Winters, 1994; Delaro, 1994; Kneese, 1994; Roby, 1995). A study by Johnson (1995) found that there was some evidence that a year-around education may promote the English verbal interaction of the students. Strong (1995) supported the validity of a year around education as an intervention to promote student acquisition. One major conclusion was that fifth-grade students profited

Nandang Kosasih Ananda is a lecturer at the Faculty of Education (FKIP) Universitas Lampung. This study was conducted when he was a doctoral student at the University of Houston, Houston, Texas-USA in 1997.

from opportunities to join with intersession tutoring program, specifically their academic achievement were progress.

In spite of the obvious importance of year-round education, relatively little experimental research has focused on what can be done to accelerate at-risk student academic achievement. The purpose of this study was to examine one program which placed in a multi-track year-round elementary school. The program was evaluated to determine whether goals for the program were being met.

The school which was the focus of this evaluation had implemented an Intersession Tutoring Program in order to provide remediation to at-risk student. An intersession was the break between instructional periods on a year-round calender. Instead of three months off during the summer, students on this campus attended school for three months followed by a one month intersession. This schedule continued on a rotating basis. Each month, one of four different tracks was on intersession, while the other three tracks were in session. For a sample of the school's calendar. This program, which brought students back on campus for one week of small group tutoring during the four week intersession, was evaluated herewith.

METHODS

The study was conducted in a suburban elementary school in a Gulf Coast State that serves approximately 855 students grad inc pre-kindergarten through five. A total of 40% of the student body qualified for free or reduced lunch. The school was ethnically diverse, with a population which included 43% white, 26% African American, and 9 % Asian.

Students who were below level, having received a grade of D or F (below 75) in either math or language arts, were in danger of receiving a falling grade in those two subject areas, or qualified for Title I Reading Enrichment services were invited to attend Intersession Tutoring classes for one of the four weeks during their intersession. The intersession teacher focused the instruction on math and language arts in a thematic setting designed around the premise of taking a cruise for the week. Curriculum was based, in large part, on information provided by classroom teachers about specific weaknesses of the students.

All students who attended a minimum of three days of intersession tutoring during at least one intersession were given the opportunity to respond to the survey developed for this study. The parents of these

students were given the opportunity to respond to the parent survey. Math and language arts teachers as well as Title I Reading Enrichment teachers of the students who attended a minimum of three days during at least one intersession were also given a teacher survey to complete. All respondents participated voluntarily and completed the surveys anonymously.

Face validity for this survey was easily established, as there were only four questions and space for recording comments and suggestions, all of which were applied directly to the Intersession Tutoring Program. Reliability would depend heavily on the willingness of the respondents to answer honestly. The total number of the students who met the criteria of attending a minimum of three days of the program during at least one intersession was 176.

The evaluation procedures were based primarily on components of the CIPP (Context, Input, Process, Product) Model by Daniel Stufflebeam and Egon Guba. The three steps put forth in the model are delineating, obtaining, and providing information. These three steps were followed in the process of this evaluation.

Only two of the four types of evaluation were of primary focus for this study, i.e. context and product. Input and process were not focus of the study as they were both already firmly in place, and there were limited choices with regard to change in those two areas. These components were not of interest of our client. The principal was seeking information more in lines with context and product component of evaluation.

The first method used to gain data was to interview both the principal and the Intersession Tutoring teachers. In order to gain specific context evaluation data, they were asked to explain what the goals and objectives of the programs were, to describe the program, to relay any perceived advantages or problems related to the program, and to provide any additional information they deemed appropriate.

Both the principal and the teacher noted that the primary objective of the program was to improve the participating students' self esteem. They noted that students who were behind typically received fewer "success messages" at school, and therefore liked school less. The tutoring program was designed to meet the students at their own level, at a smaller pupil-teacher ratio, and move the students forward in the curriculum as much as possible in the weeks they attended.

The secondary objective, as stated by both the principal and the teacher, was for the students to achieve academic gain. It was considered

a secondary objective because the perception was that if students felt better about themselves and about the school, the academic gains would be more easily facilitated, both in tutoring and in the regular classroom.

When asked if there were any written or documented goals and objectives of the program, both the principal and the teacher stated that they were not aware of any. The results of these interviews, therefore, constituted the context portion of the evaluation.

The evaluators developed surveys to distribute to three key populations who could provide valuable information regarding the program and its influence on students' self esteem. Survey were distributed to students who met the criteria for the study, their parents, and their math and language arts and Title Reading Enrichment teachers.

Questions were parallel on the three surveys. Question one sought to determine if the program was enjoyed, question two asked about perceived academic gain, question three asked if there was positive impact on self-esteem in school, question four asked if the students liked school better as a result of the program. Additional room was provided for comments or suggestions.

In attempt to assess whether students demonstrated academic progress, report card grades (recorded in numerical form from zero to one hundred) were analyzed. Students' grades in math and language arts were recorded both during the six-week period immediately before attending the program (pretest) and the six-week period immediately after the program (posttest). These data were analyzed using a T-test.

RESULTS

Results reported below reflect data collected by two means: surveys completed by students, parents, and teachers, and pretest-posttest (report card) data. Survey data were reported first, as they more closely reflected students' self-esteem and attitudes toward school, reported to be the primary objective of the program.

The results of the survey completed by the Student indicate that 98% of the students enjoyed the Program Intersession Tutoring (83% very much and 15% somewhat). Students reported that they learned something in the program for the 98% of the time (73% very much and 25% somewhat). Students reported that they had more confidence in school as a result of the program at level of 94% (76% very much and 18%

somewhat). As to whether they liked school better because of the program, 91% reported that they did (73% very much, 18% somewhat).

Data from parent were similarly positive. All parents reported that they believed their children enjoyed the Intersession Tutoring Program (80% very much, 20% somewhat). Parents reported that their children made academic progress in the program for the 98% of the time (63% very much, 35% somewhat). In addition, parents perceived that their children now had more confidence in school as a result of the program of the time (63% very much, 30% somewhat). Parents reported that they believed their children liked school better as a result of the program on 95% of the surveys (45% very much, 40% somewhat).

Teacher survey data echo the support for the program's goals found in the student and parent surveys. All teachers reported that they believed their students enjoyed the Intersession Tutoring Program (95% very much, 5% somewhat). Likewise, all teachers reported that their students made academic progress as a result of attending the program (52% very much, 48% somewhat). All teachers also reported they believed the students had more confidence in school as a result of the program (71% very much, 29% somewhat). The majority of the teachers (95%) reported that they believed their students like school better as a result of the Intersession Tutoring Program (71% very much, 24% somewhat). (For more complete survey data, samples of responses from the comments/suggestions portion of the surveys, see Appendix).

A level statistical significance was not achieved in any of the three quantitative measures conducted on report card data. An analysis of language arts grades, math grades, and a combination of both math and language arts grade had p values of .612, .584, and .975 respectively.

Language arts grades had the following values: pretest mean 78.48 (standard deviation = 8.25) and posttest mean was 78.15 (standard deviation = 7.71, p = .612). For math grades, the values were: pretest mean was 79.27 (standard deviation = 8.23), and posttest mean was 78.63 (standard deviation = 8.19, p = .584). When language arts and math grade were combined for a global look at the report card grades before and after attending the program, the values were: pretest mean was 78.88 (standard deviation = 8.23) and posttest mean was 78.89 (standard deviation = 7.79, p = .975). More detailed information on report card data, can be seen in Appendix).

DISCUSSION

A total of 176 students attended Intersession Tutoring Program for a minimum of three days during at least one intersession. As of April 19, taking into account all absences and at a conservative estimate of five hours of instruction per school day, students received a total of 5,495 hours of Intersession Tutoring Instruction.

During the course of the interviews with the principal and program the teacher, hidden advantages of the program were discovered. One of such advantages was the fact that transportation was provided for the students attending the program. Since the buses were running to deliver the "on-track" students to class, the tutoring students simply rode their regular bus to school. There was also no cost by the parents for the program, as the teacher was paid using compensatory funds. In this community, as the principal stated, there had been traditionally very poor attendance at summer school, the remediation alternative for schools on a "traditional" agrarian calendar. Cost and transportation were the factors. This program thus provided remediation to at-risk students without financial or transportation burdens to the parents.

The timing of the remediation was also perceived as a benefit by both the teacher and the principal. As opposed to the summer school model, where students have a full nine months of instruction to "fall behind", this model provided remediation after only three months, while the school year was still in progress.

Results of the student, parent, and teacher surveys were overwhelmingly positive. Students stated that they enjoyed the program, that they perceived they had made academic progress as a result of the program, that they had more confidence in school as a result of the program, and that they liked school better as a result of the program. Parents and teachers had similar perceptions regarding the results of the program. In each case, more than 90% of the respondents reported positive effects of the program.

The analysis of the report card grades did not yield statistically significant gains in scores in math or reading or in a combination of the two after attending the program. Many variables which could not be controlled for the given data used in this analysis render the data less powerful than the evaluators would have liked. (An example of such a variable would be time and curriculum covered between attendance at

the Intersession Tutoring Program and the end of a reporting period). However, no other pretest data were available at the time of the request for evaluation. Since the program was designed to meet the student at his/her present level, and only at-risk students attended the program, the use of report card data on measure academic gain was a misnomer. The teacher stated that the students in the program were typically working on material that was more than six weeks behind where "on level" students at the grade level were working. There was no attempt made to predict what posttest scores for these students might have been in the absence of the Tutoring Program. This method was a weak attempt at determining whether the students had achieved academic progress as it was contaminated with many intervening variables. Considering these factors, looking for significant gains on report card grades would not be expected to yield positive results.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusions

Based on the results of this study, the following conclusions were drawn. There were positive attitudes among the students, parents, and teachers toward the intersession tutoring program. The students stated that they enjoyed the program, that they perceived they had made academic progress as a result of the program, that they had more confidence in school as a result of the program, and that they liked the school as a result of the program. Parents and teachers also had similar perceptions regarding the results of the program. Although the analysis of the report card grade did not yield statistically significant gains in scores of the courses, the program had positive impact on students' academic progress. Since the program was designed to meet the student at his or her present level, and only at-risk students attended the program, the use of report card data to measure academic gain was a misnomer.

Suggestions

Considering the results of the study, the following suggestions might be applicable to Indonesian schools. Since the intersession tutoring program had positive impact specifically on students' attitudes, and academic progress, it is suggested that Indonesian schools may consider to apply this

kind of program to improve students' academic achievement. The study indicated that intersession tutoring program is an important aspect of helping at-risk students; therefore, Indonesian schools should learn from this experience seriously to improve students' attitudes and academic progress. Since the Indonesian schools are interested in conducting intersession tutoring program, it is suggested that a replication of evaluating the program should be made with a large interview sample in order to get more information in regard to the impact of intersession program on students' attitudes and academic program.

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